

# Berimbau de Barriga



## Before you Begin

You may find that when you first receive your Berimbau, the tone is not pleasing. Just as with any string instrument, it is shipped out of tune. Tuning an instrument adds stress and stress during shipping can lead to damage. Also, if an instrument is shipped or stored for any length of time it should be de-tuned to remove the stress. In the case of the Berimbau, the bow will eventually take on a permanent bend. This will decrease the tension on the string. So if you are not planning to play your Berimbau for awhile, loosen the string.

## Berimbau History

Although the Berimbau is considered a Brazilian instrument, most authorities accept that it originated in Africa. From there, it was brought to Brazil in the 1500's by Bantu slaves. For these slaves, the Berimbau represented more than their heritage. It offered them a means of secret communication that could not be understood by the slave owners.

Historical references from the early 19th century document the presence of a variety of African musical bows in the Brazilian culture. It is said that African-Brazilian street vendors used these musical bows to attract customers. At that time each variation had a different African name; such as urucungu, madimba lungungo, mbulumbumba, and hungu.

By the end of the nineteenth century these variations had fused into one instrument called the berimbau de barriga, or "jaw harp of the stomach." Around the same time the Berimbau was reinvented from the street vender's call to an essential application in the African-Brazilian martial art form known as capoeira. Today, capoeira continues to be fought to the Berimbau rhythms (toques).

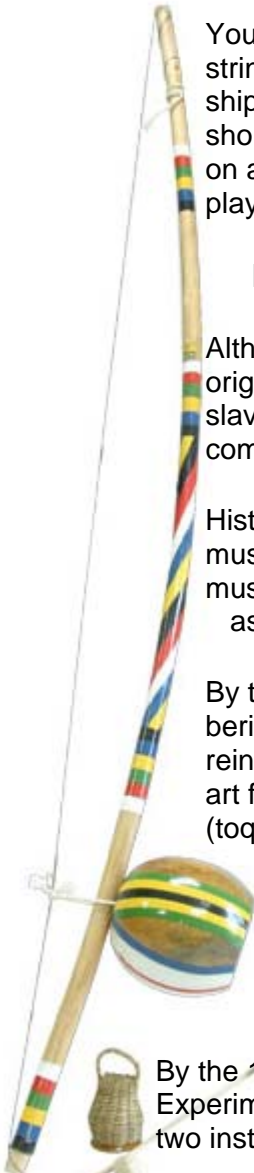
Besides its close association with capoeira, the Berimbau has long been used in a variety of Brazilian folk and popular music forms, such as samba de roda, carimbo, bossa nova, afro-samba and tropicalismo. It was not until the end of the 1960s, the Berimbau immigrated to the United States in association with modern rock and jazz.

By the 1990's new performance techniques and structural changes exploded for the Berimbau. Experimentation included the addition of tuning hardware, super-sizing for a bass Berimbau, joining two instruments to create a double stringed

Berimbau, and wiring the instrument with multiple microphones. New techniques included a free-hand grip. While cumbersome to even look at, the free-hand grip allows the hand to slide the noting-stone farther up and down the string; allowing many more notes than the traditional two pitches. New sounds were added, such as tapping on the gourd with the stone/coin, fingers and stick. The traditional, or purist, Berimbau players might object to these changes. However, these new evolutionary steps have introduced the Berimbau into Turkish rhythms. From Africa, to secret communications in Brazil, to fighting rhythms, to Jazz, Rock and Roll and now Turkish rhythms, the Berimbau continues to make significant contributions to popular music.

## Berimbau Construction

The Berimbau de Barriga, derives its name from the biriba wood used to make the bow (the verga). The verga is forced into the bow shape and held there by a single steel string (the arame). One end of the string is looped over the end of the bow. Then the string crosses over the other end of the bow and wraps around the shaft before being securely tied. To complete the instrument a gourd (cabaca) is cut open, hollowed out and dried before it is tied around the string and bow to act as the resonator. The gourd rests against the convex



back of the bow. The string loop securing the gourd, serves as a bridge, dividing the string into two sections. The accessories include a wooden plectrum (vaqueta), a noting-piece, usually a stone or coin (pedra, moeda or dobrão) and a small woven rattle (caxixi).

## How to Play the Berimbau

The simplicity of this instrument belies the varied rhythms and sounds that can be achieved when it is played.

To play the Berimbau, hold it in your less dominate hand. Wrap the two middle fingers around the bow, and place the little finger under the string loop tied to the gourd. The opening of the gourd should face your abdomen. In this way you can balance the weight. Place the noting-stone between the index and thumb of the same hand that holds the Berimbau. In your dominate hand, hold the plectrum and the caxixi. ®

To sound the instrument, tap out rhythms on the string with the plectrum. This motion will also add the she-she sound from the rattling caxixi. To vary the tone even more, alternate pressing the gourd against your abdomen and pulling it away. Opening and closing the gourd will produce a wah-wah sound. The sound of the Berimbau is less a factor of the size, though the length of the string will alter the notes. It is more a factor of the diameter and hardness of the bow's wood and the quality of the gourd. The Best Berimbau are made from the biriba wood and the cabaca gourd.

Now try noting the string. You can press the string with the noting-stone before you hit it, just after you hit it, you can slide the stone along the string, or even hold the stone barely against the string for a vibration effect. The harder you hold the stone against the string the higher the pitch. An open string is a low note. The longer you play the more variations you will find. With all the pressing, moving in and out, tapping and shaking, it takes some practice to balance the Berimbau without knocking yourself the head. But courage, its light and you will get the hang of it.

## Can you tune a Berimbau?

Yes, you can, to a imited extent. To tune the Berimbau, side off the gourd and untie the cord holding the steel string to the bow. Lay the bow across two chairs and gently press down on the center of the bow. Now adjust the steel string so it is taught across the ends of the bow. There should be some slack, remember you still have to tie on the gourd. Do not over bend the bow, you are not trying to create enough tension to make a Bow and Arrow set! Warp the string around the bow a few times and tie it securly with the cord. Now slide the gourd back order the bow and string. Once it is set up, the Berimbau can be tuned by sliding the gourd a little up or down from the place where the sound is best.

## Replacing the string

If you need to replace the wire, please vist your local hardware store. They can assist you in finding one of similar gauge.

